

SECRET



**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR**

25 June 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: Brigadier General Alexander Haig  
Deputy Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Chicago Sun-Times Leak

1. Per your call to me this evening, we have checked and I believe we have traced down the document on which the Chicago Sun-Times story is based. At this writing, we have only the AP ticker item on the Sun-Times story, not the full text, hence detailed textual comparisons are not possible; but I am almost certain the story reflects a slanted and selective account of National Intelligence Estimate 50-68: Southeast Asia after Vietnam, dated 14 November 1968. This NIE is classified "SECRET/SENSITIVE, Limited Distribution, Controlled Dissem." As reflected in the classification, NIE 50-68 was given a tightly controlled and restricted dissemination.

2. Time pressures do not permit a check of the log records, but I am almost certain this estimate was included in one of the reading packages sent to then President-elect Nixon (and Dr. Kissinger) after the November 1968 election but before the President's inauguration in January 1969.

3. The full text of the estimate is appended hereto. I believe the Sun-Times story (or at least the portion of that story precised in the AP ticker version) is based on a selective and distorted version of NIE 50-68's paragraphs 14, 17-20, and 28-32--plus the first sentence of paragraph 24. The Sun-Times story completely ignores the argument developed in the second and third sentences of paragraph 24 and amplified in paragraphs 25, 26, and 27.

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4. The verbal parallels between NIE 50-68 and the Sun-Times story are not precise, but the echoes of the language and portions of the argument of the estimate's paragraphs cited above are sufficiently strong in the Sun-Times story that I am quite confident that we have pinpointed the document on which that story purports to be based.

5. I am also confident that a parallel examination of the full Sun-Times text with the language of the estimate paragraphs cited above would strongly support the thesis that NIE 50-68 had been passed or disclosed to unauthorized persons.



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George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment:  
NIE 50-68

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES  
SAT., 21 JUNE 71

# Tell CIA pullout advice to Nixon

By Morton Kondracke  
and Thomas B. Ross

Sun-Times Bureau

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WASHINGTON — The Nixon administration was advised by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1969 that it could immediately withdraw from Vietnam and "all of Southeast Asia would remain just as it is at least for another generation."

Government documents revealed Friday that the CIA offered the following prediction

or what would happen if President Nixon, at the start of his administration, had pulled all U.S. troops out of Vietnam and opened the way to a possible Viet Cong take-over of the Saigon government:

"We would lose Laos immediately. Sihanouk would preserve Cambodia by a straddling effort. All of Southeast Asia would remain just as it is at least for another generation."

"Thailand, in particular, would continue to maintain close relations with the U.S. and would seek additional support. Simultaneously, Thailand would make overtures and move toward China and the Soviet Union. It would simply take aid from both sides to preserve its independence."

"North Vietnam would consume itself in Laos and South Vietnam. Only Laos would definitely follow into the Communist orbit."

In totally rejecting the so-called domino theory on which U.S. policy was based in the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the CIA took a position consistent with a long line of estimates dating back to the original U.S. involvement in 1954.

For example, the documents show that on May 25, 1964, the CIA declared in a National Intelligence Estimate that the United States would "retain considerable leverage in South-

Robert McNamara's doubts in 1966 on escalating the war revealed, Page 6.

east Asia even if Laos and South Vietnam came under North Vietnamese control."

The CIA produced the estimate as part of its pessimistic assessment of the value of launching a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. It argued that air attacks were unlikely to break Hanoi's will and carried the danger of escalating the war into a direct confrontation with Communism, China and the Soviet Union.

"Retaliatory measures which the North might take in Laos and South Vietnam," the CIA declared, "might make it increasingly difficult for the U.S. to regain its objectives as attainable by limited means. Thus, difficulties of comprehension might increase on both sides as scale of action mounted."

Former President Lyndon B. Johnson rejected the CIA's advice and started sustained bombing in February, 1965.

Similarly, President Nixon disregarded the

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## CIA's advice to Nixon told

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CIA estimate in 1969 and decided on a slow withdrawal, an expansion of the war into Cambodia and Laos and a partial revival of the bombing of North Vietnam.

On several occasions since coming to office, Mr. Nixon has referred to immediate, total U.S. withdrawal from Southeast Asia as "precipitate" and the equivalent of "our defeat and humiliation."

In various ways, he has signaled an intention to preserve non-Communist governments in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Instead of pulling out of Vietnam rapidly, Mr. Nixon has withdrawn gradually, to give the South Vietnamese a "reasonable chance" to maintain their present government.

U.S. troop levels were at 540,000 when Mr. Nixon took office. They are scheduled to be down to 184,000 by Dec. 1, close to the end of Mr. Nixon's third year in office. The President has not said when — if ever — U.S. forces will be completely gone from Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon stoutly denied that the invasions of Cambodia in 1969 and Laos in 1970 constituted expansions of the war or were even related to political conditions in those countries.

In 1969, U.S. troops joined South Vietnamese forces in the invasion, while the Laos incursion was conducted by Vietnamese ground forces supported by U.S. planes and helicopters.

Mr. Nixon defended both actions as efforts to speed the "end of the war" in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the administration has exhibited interest in preserving the non-Communist character of the governments of Laos and Cambodia.

There has been a massive infusion of military and economic aid to the anti-Communist regime of Lon Nol in Cambodia, and U.S. air power continues to support South Vietnamese and Cambodian army combat operations there.

The Cambodian operations began on the

heels of Lon Nol's overthrow of Sihanouk, the man the CIA predicted would retain power if the United States left Southeast Asia. The United States did not leave, and Sihanouk fell. In some quarters, his overthrow has been ascribed to the CIA.

In Laos, the United States has continued extensive bombing raids both along the Ho Chi Minh infiltration routes in the southern part of the country and in north Laos near the Plain of Jars.

The north Laos operations — bombing and aid to anti-Communist guerillas—are linked to retention of a neutralist government in Vientiane, the capital.

The government documents, disclosed to The Sun-Times by a number of reliable sources, show the CIA consistently reported that the bombing of North Vietnam was not effective, either in military or political terms.

The CIA's estimates, the documents also reveal, provided the basis for former Defense Sec. Clark Clifford's silent campaign to get the bombing stopped in 1968.

The CIA's Office of National Estimates advanced the case against the bombing in 1965 despite CIA Director John A. McCone's advice that U.S. planes "hit them harder, more frequently, and inflict greater damage."

In an April 2, 1965, memo to Sec. of State Dean Rusk, White House adviser McGeorge Bundy and Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, McCone argued that Mr. Johnson's decision the previous day to commit U.S. troops to combat would: work only "if our air strikes against the north are sufficiently heavy and damaging really to hurt the North Vietnamese."

He warned that a slow escalation of the bombing would open the U.S. government to "increasing pressure" from the press and public opinion to stop the raids.

Then, McCone concluded: "We will find ourselves mired down in combat in the jungle in a military effort that we cannot win, and from which we will have extreme difficulty in extracting ourselves."

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CHICAGO AP - The Chicago Sun-Times said Friday that government documents revealed the Central Intelligence Agency advised President Richard M. Nixon in 1969 that if the United States withdrew from Vietnam "all of Southeast Asia would remain just as it is for another generation."

The Sun-Times said in the early edition of its Saturday newspaper that President Nixon disregarded the CIA estimate and decided on a slow withdrawal, an expansion of the war into Cambodia and Laos and a partial reviving of bombing in North Vietnam.

The copyright story quoted a CIA advisory to the President as saying, "We would lose Laos immediately. Sihanouk would preserve Cambodia by a straddling effort. All of Southeast Asia would remain just as it is for another generation."

Prince Norodom Sihanouk was ousted as Cambodia's chief of state by a coup in March 1970 while he was visiting Moscow.

"Thailand, in particular, would continue to maintain close relations with the U.S. and would seek additional support. Simultaneously, Thailand would make overtures and move toward China and the Soviet Union. . . North Vietnam would consume itself in Laos and South Vietnam. Only Laos would definitely follow into the Communist orbit," the Sun-Times quoted the CIA estimate as saying.

The newspaper said the CIA estimate dated back to 1964 and that former President Lyndon B. Johnson rejected the CIA's advice in 1965 and began sustained bombing.

The government documents, which the Sun-Times did not identify as part of the top secret Pentagon study published in several other newspapers, said that the CIA consistently opposed bombing of North Vietnam on the grounds that it was not effective in military or political terms.

The Justice Department has taken no action to halt publication by the Sun-Times of stories dealing with Vietnam policy decisions allegedly disclosed by government documents.

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CHICAGO (UPI)--THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY TOLD THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION IN 1963 THAT IT COULD IMMEDIATELY WITHDRAW FROM VIETNAM AND "ALL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA WOULD REMAIN JUST AS IT IS FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER GENERATION." THE CHICAGO SUN-TIMES SAID IN A COPYRIGHTED STORY IN TODAY'S EDITIONS.

"WE COULD LOSE LAOS IMMEDIATELY," THE NEWSPAPER SAID, QUOTING WHAT IT SAID WERE SECRET GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS. "SIAMBOUR WOULD PRESERVE CAMBODIA BY A STRADDLING EFFORT. ALL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA WOULD REMAIN JUST AS IT IS FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER GENERATION.

"THAILAND, IN PARTICULAR, WOULD CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AND WOULD SEEK ADDITIONAL SUPPORT. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THAILAND WOULD MAKE OVERTURES AND MOVE TOWARD CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION, OR WOULD SIMPLY TAKE AID FROM BOTH SIDES TO PRESERVE ITS INDEPENDENCE.

"NORTH VIETNAM WOULD CONSUME ITSELF IN LAOS AND SOUTH VIETNAM. ONLY LAOS WOULD DEFINITELY FOLLOW INTO THE COMMUNIST ORBIT."

THE SUN-TIMES SAID THE CIA TOTALLY REJECTED "THE SO-CALLED DOMINO THEORY ON WHICH U.S. POLICY WAS BASED IN THE EISENHOWER, KENNEDY AND JOHNSON ADMINISTRATIONS" AND FOLLOWED A POSITION CONSISTENT WITH A LONG LINE OF ESTIMATES DATING BACK TO THE ORIGINAL INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM IN 1954.

"FOR EXAMPLE," THE NEWSPAPER SAID, "THE DOCUMENTS SHOW THAT ON MAY 25, 1964, THE CIA DECLARED IN A NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD 'RETAIN CONSIDERABLE LEVERAGE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA EVEN IF LAOS AND SOUTH VIETNAM CAME UNDER NORTH VIETNAMESE CONTROL.'"

THE SUN-TIMES SAID THE ESTIMATE WAS PRODUCED AS PART OF THE CIA PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE VALUE OF LAUNCHING A BOMBING ATTACK AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM. THE CIA, ACCORDING TO THE NEWSPAPER, ARGUED THAT AIR ATTACKS WERE UNLIKELY TO BREAK HANOI'S WILL AND CARRIED THE DANGER OF ESCALATING THE WAR INTO "A DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH COMMUNIST CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION."

THE PAPER SAID PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON REJECTED THE CIA ADVICE AND BEGAN SUSTAINED BOMBINGS OF THE NORTH.

"SIMILARLY, PRESIDENT NIXON DISREGARDED THE CIA ESTIMATE IN 1969, IN DECIDING ON A SLOW WITHDRAWAL, EXPANSION OF THE WAR INTO LAOS AND CAMBODIA AND PARTIAL REVIVAL OF THE BOMBING OF THE NORTH.

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